

## IN THE CLAIMS

**Please amend the claims as follows:**

Claims 1-19 (Cancelled)

20. (Currently Amended) A panel barrier assembly for providing a panel barrier within a framed volume, said panel barrier assembly comprising:

a substantially flat panel for providing a barrier within the framed volume; and

at least one panel retention device for compressively securing said panel against at least two opposing frame surface areas such that the panel is securely suspended within the framed volume, said at least one panel retention device comprising:

a substantially U-shaped bracket member fitted over an edge of the panel; and

a rack and gear mechanism affixed to said bracket member, said rack and gear mechanism comprising:

a driving gear; [[and]]

a rack member having a foot member attached at one end and further having a rack gear engaging said driving gear such that said rack member is linearly movable with respect to said bracket member responsive to rotational actuation of said driving gear; and

ratchet means restricting bidirectional linear motion of said rack member with respect to said bracket member, wherein said ratchet means comprises:

a row of ratchet teeth on a lengthwise side surface of said rack member; and

a ratchet arm member engaging the ratchet teeth to allow advancement of said rack member in a linear direction in which a foot member affixed to one end of said rack member extends outwardly away from said bracket member and inhibits retraction of said rack member in the opposing linear direction.

21. (Original) The panel barrier assembly of claim 20, wherein said driving gear is a spur gear having a rotary actuation plane parallel to the panel.

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Cancelled)

25. (Currently Amended) ~~The panel barrier assembly of claim 24~~ A panel barrier assembly for providing a panel barrier within a framed volume, said panel barrier assembly comprising:

a substantially flat panel for providing a barrier within the framed volume; and  
at least one panel retention device for compressively securing said panel against at least two opposing frame surface areas such that the panel is securely suspended within the framed volume, said at least one panel retention device comprising:

a substantially U-shaped bracket member fitted over an edge of the panel; and  
a rack and gear mechanism affixed to said bracket member, said rack and gear mechanism comprising:

a driving gear;

a rack member having a foot member attached at one end and further having a rack gear engaging said driving gear such that said rack member is linearly movable with respect to said bracket member responsive to rotational actuation of said driving gear; and

support bearing means for providing vertical lengthwise bearing support and horizontal lengthwise bearing support for said rack member, wherein said support bearing means comprises:

a vertical bearing guide channel disposed lengthwise along a lateral side of said rack member; and

a vertical guide member fixedly attached to said bracket and having a guide flange engaged into said vertical bearing guide channel.

26. (Currently Amended) ~~The panel barrier assembly of claim 24~~ A panel barrier assembly for providing a panel barrier within a framed volume, said panel barrier assembly comprising:

a substantially flat panel for providing a barrier within the framed volume; and

at least one panel retention device for compressively securing said panel against at least two opposing frame surface areas such that the panel is securely suspended within the framed volume, said at least one panel retention device comprising:

a substantially U-shaped bracket member fitted over an edge of the panel; and

a rack and gear mechanism affixed to said bracket member, said rack and gear mechanism comprising:

a driving gear;

a rack member having a foot member attached at one end and further having a rack gear engaging said driving gear such that said rack member is linearly movable with respect to said bracket member responsive to rotational actuation of said driving gear; and

support bearing means for providing vertical lengthwise bearing support and horizontal lengthwise bearing support for said rack member, wherein said support bearing means comprises:

a horizontal bearing guide channel disposed lengthwise along said rack gear; and

a horizontal guide member fixedly attached to said bracket and having a guide flange engaged into said horizontal bearing guide channel.

27. (Original) The panel barrier assembly of claim 20, wherein said rack and gear mechanism is fabricated from a composite polymer.

28. (Original) The panel barrier assembly of claim 27, wherein said composite polymer comprises Delrin.